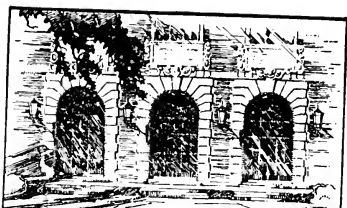


THE LAST

OF THE CORNETS

COLONEL ROWAN HAMILTON



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THE LAST OF THE CORNETS.

VOL. II.

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THE
LAST OF THE CORNETS.

A NOVEL.

BY
COLONEL ROWAN HAMILTON.

“ What is fame to him that founders struggling with a quicksand chance ;
What is all the gold that glitters to the fool of circumstance ?
Round him rush the eddying waters, on his face the sea winds play,
And afar on roseate summits melts the solitary day.”—F. W. MYERS.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CONTENTS.

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	PAGE
CHAPTER I.,	1
CHAPTER II.,	12
CHAPTER III.,	25
CHAPTER IV.,	40
CHAPTER V.,	52
CHAPTER VI.,	64
CHAPTER VII.,	74
CHAPTER VIII.,	90
CHAPTER IX.,	99
CHAPTER X.,	117
CHAPTER XI.,	124
CHAPTER XII.,	134
CHAPTER XIII.,	143
CHAPTER XIV.,	161

THE LAST OF THE CORNETS.

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THE LAST OF THE CORNETS.



CHAPTER I.

“I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
Straining upon the start.”

WE had now, after leaving Seaforde, where I obtained my promotion, been stationed at Aldershot rather more than a year, and were holding our Regimental Steeplechases later than usual, viz., in the first week of May, having had to postpone them for several reasons. And pleasant as are all soldiers' meetings, on the flat or over obstacles, Divisional, Brigade, or Regimental,

for real enjoyment I maintain the latter bears the palm. As a visitor, you feel you belong more properly to the regiment which solely looks after you and is catering for your amusement, whose band is playing hard by, and whose troopers are lining the ropes and filling the enclosure. There is much the same difference between the pleasure attained at a public ball, say at Willis's Rooms, and that enjoyed at a country-house dance, albeit the public one may be the better done of the two. At the country-house one, you know more people intimately, the hosts are probably your friends, you take more interest in the company, the decoration of the rooms, the way the local band acquits itself, and finally a larger amount of gratitude wells up in your heart, especially after supper, to your entertainers.

At the Grand Military or Divisional Chases you are but one of a crowd, and if the arrangements are more perfect, the interest you feel in the riders and their horses is very much less so—for you can know but very few of them. But to-day you have been well posted in the merits and demerits of all the horses, and all the men, as you drove down, after discussing a late breakfast in barracks, to the course. The Jehu on the box, who was running and riding something himself, made you quite *au fait* with all that was going on, and all the surprises that he only knew of. Had you been a casual friend, you would have been met at the station, and driven over in a dog-cart to the course, where you would soon have picked up both fresh friends and the latest information, not to speak of a biscuit

and a glass of champagne from the half-dozen bottles that are secreted in the back of the coach for the behoof of travellers, while the luncheon tent is unopened.

Let us suppose that the dust you have ploughed through in crossing the sandy ridges that intervene between the barracks and the old racecourse has been “a sufficient excuse” for the glass, and that, having had your hat well brushed, you have slipped off your summer overcoat and strapped on your binoculars ; you are now entitled to take a general view from the seat of your conveyance, or walk about enjoying the *coup d’œil*, and inhale the breezes fresh from the pine woods, ozone-laden, which will give you such an appetite by-and-by ; but more likely, having marked some fair and charming acquaintance on the roof of the coach,

you look up, and, if there is room, climb up there also ; or, leaning with an elbow on the door of some barouche, exchange the “ airy nothings ” of conversation, with your back to the enclosure. This sort of badinage is very easily inaugurated, but it does not “ stay,” and after you have run through the whole gamut of the weather, the journey, the going, and the chance of this or that horse, and (*N.B.*) his rider, you find you have exhausted the *patois* befitting the occasion. Your only salvation is the legitimate excuse that the riders ought to have “ weighed out,” and that you really must go and see whatever the delay is.

But let us answer that question. To begin with, the Chief had only got down from town that morning, and, instead of the light and casual work he expected, had

first of all to ride up to the Brigade office and interchange views with the Brigade Major regarding a certain flying column that was to come off in the near future ; then, on his return there were documents which “ must be signed,” from the Quartermaster’s department, and from the pay office marked “ very pressing ;” and as he was in the orderly room, he was bound more or less to see the prisoners, and as a matter of course there were more of them ; altogether, he and the Adjutant, who were starter and “ clerk of the scales,” were long and vexatiously delayed. One delay leads to another, troop officers were slower getting into their mufti or breeches and boots, and the string was later starting for the paddock ; verily, therefore, when the majority were upon the scene of action, there was

a certain amount of confusion ; here was some one looking for the leads that would make him the right weight ; there was another looking for the saddle that would enable him to ride without dead weight. Fitzgerald is found to be four pounds lighter than he expected, and is recommended cocoa and early hours, vice tea and late trains from town. The babel increases while the lenders and borrowers of racing gear are crowded in upon by officers from other regiments ; friends whose curiosity would never be satisfied without penetrating the arena of the holy of holies, while grooms keep appearing and disappearing with saddles, saddle - cloths, weights, bandages, etc. And at every race meeting of the sort, there is always a small minority who never seem to have mastered the

details and conditions under which they are required to run, and who further embarrass the officials by asking for explanations of what they ought to have known long ago. The *mauvais quatre d'heure* has almost past, but some one has suddenly discovered that, according to the enactments framed for the day, the horses of the Colonel cannot go to the post until he has paid his sub. and entrances to Mr Harrington, the secretary, and also his stakes in the match that had been arranged between his and Captain Rickman's horse. Then there arose a hue-and-cry for a cheque-book ; nobody in the tent had one, of course, but at last MacDonagh was got hold of, and produced one on Cox & Co.'s from the pocket of his covert coat.

“ Always ask a man who is broke for his

cheque-book," laughed Allan. "He is always good for that, anyway." And, as he gave it to the Colonel, he said, "Would you mind paying me over the pigeons? I make it out two-and-twenty pounds."

"Most certainly, MacDonagh; let me see," said the Colonel. "There's you, and Forster, and Harrington, twenty-two, and fifty, and twenty pounds; Harrington, Forster and you," he added, reversing the order, to be sure of names and amounts; and catching up the cheque-book, the Chief had written "pay Cornet MacDonagh" when he paused, saying,—"But you forget you were loser of a fiver backing Burton against me at the twenty-eight yards rise." Meantime, the bell was ringing loudly that announced the horses were going to the post, and the Colonel's cob could be seen passing and repassing the

opening of the tent in a suggestive manner, so therefore Colonel Layton felt hurried, and exclaimed, "You don't mind our not settling till after the races, do you, Allan? I'm keeping everybody waiting," and tearing the yet unsigned cheque out of the book, he crumpled it up and tossed it into a corner, and proceeded to fill up the more pressing documents.

The tent was immediately cleared, and the Colonel was not long cantering down to the post to start them for the Regimental Cup, and while he is parading them, let us see what occurred in the aforesaid tent. Captain Rickman, who is going to ride in the next race, but not in this, finds that he wants a pound of the proper weight, and thinks that very likely there may be one lying about the tent, so he just halloas out to Mat O'Halloran,

who is about to take his place at the ropes, "I say, Mat, just run into the tent and see if you can pick up an odd pound weight; there's sure to be one lying about somewhere on the table, or about the scales." Mat did not see one, but he turned over the cloths and saddles and other paraphernalia, and in doing so he descried what looked like a cheque. It might be useful, he thought, signed or unsigned, or that if filled he might get a reward for returning it honestly. Mat therefore pocketed the little bit of stamped paper, and ran back in a hurry, saying that there was only a couple of weighted saddle cloths which he daren't touch, and no weights lying about, but that he would procure him one after the race was over.

CHAPTER II.

“They laugh who win.”

BUT we have left the horses, six in number, at the post all this time; let us see how they fare. The card reads as follows :—

Mr Godsall's The Gunner (Captain Blake).

Colonel Layton's Roscommon (Captain Burton).

Captain Watson's Goldseeker (Owner).

Major Merrilis's The Badger (Mr Stevenson).

Mr Fitzgerald's Rathcoffey (Owner).

Mr MacDonagh's The Pinnace (Owner).

Needless to relate that half the horses were only christened the day the entries closed, and had been generally known hitherto by an allusion to their qualifications, colour, or defects, *e.g.*, Captain Watson's chip-kneed horse, the Squire's rat-tailed hunter, etc. Of course The Gunner is rapidly made a hot favourite in the ring, while The Pinnace has many friends, but, nevertheless, the most observant and most knowing man in the regiment, the Paymaster, Captain Peebles, who, though he did not pretend to ride himself, and only came out hunting, "just to see how you fellows ride," and who always drove a coach of his own with four long-tailed four-year-olds (such was his freak), had long ago got on a quiet fiver on Fitzgerald's Rathcoffey, the training of which he had superintended himself, so to

speak, unbeknownst, and when no one else was up; Fitzgerald also had he coached after the most approved fashion, almost overdoing his entreaties to him to sit still and trust more to the whip in his left hand than his spurs, if Captain Blake came with a rush in the last few strides for the purpose of winning a "gallery race by a neck on the post;" coach him also he did too in the nature of the ground, where to take a pull, and where to slip away with his horse.

But the flag has dropped to an indifferent start. The old course was a right-handed semi-circular one of crescent shape, the diameter of which formed the straight run home; and, starting at the upper end with their backs to the water-jump, and going twice round, horses completed a journey of something under three miles

when they reached the winning-post. The start is up a slight incline, and the pace so slow that Captain Burton thinks that if he does not hurry matters, his horse, which he does not know very well, may refuse; but he knows this much, that, even with the weight upon him, he can stay for ever, so he takes a commanding lead, which he increases over the first easy fence, a narrow bank with whins and thorns stuck upon the crown. Captain Watson is the nearest to him, and a length hardly separates the other four, who pass and repass each other as they fly the stiff-made gorse-entwined hurdles, as they go more resolutely at the artificial hedge with the post and rails in front, slacken speed, and get their horses' quarters under them for a bit of an up-jump at a bank with a small open ditch in front. A

sticky horse will top the bank, but there is no occasion to ; Roscommon does so, losing a couple of seconds in the transaction. Watson, Fitzgerald, and Blake take it almost together ; and, descending the long incline to the water-jump, which, placed at an angle, lets them on to the flat, nearly catch the Colonel's horse, who, as he lands in front of them, just splashes the water up with his hind feet. All are well over, and MacDonagh, thinking it opportune, sends his horse along, and, as they pass the carriages, takes second place, and, rushing the water at the upper extremity of the diameter, for the first time assumes the lead ; and had he been content with just doing this, it is possible he might have won, but he is asking too much so early in the race ; no change of any importance takes

place till the last big fence is approached. Roscommon has gradually dropped behind. The Pinnacle leads, but he hung just a little over the last obstacle, and Allan has thought it only prudent to get him better in hand, keep him more within himself, and let him slow down a bit, or there may be grief. Rath-coffey is going well and strong, and jumping with ease, and his rider sees that he holds The Pinnacle safe as they land together over the big fence ; a couple of lengths in their wake, Goldseeker and The Badger have been hustled along—the former just half a length in front of the latter, who is well on the inside of the course ; but Goldseeker has tired to nothing ; he is, besides, a resolute rusher when he chooses, and, with only one side to his mouth, difficult to stop or turn ; he will not have the big up-jump the second

time, but Watson's hands and the pace are too good to let him refuse it altogether, but, swerving to the right, despite of the left rein (the spur only makes him jump the bigger), he springs at the protecting wing, and, smashing through it, pecks on to his knees, pulling Watson over his head, drives Billy Stevenson and The Badger out of the course, and at the same time impedes Captain Blake, who was coming up on the inside, forcing him to "left incline a bit," and just, as he afterwards accounts for things, ruining his race. "How that boy Fitzgerald has slipped me," thinks Captain Blake; "it will take me all my time and all I know to catch him, if I can do it now." The pair in front are going well together; MacDonagh just jumps the first on to the course, but he has the outside, and loses a

length. Coming down the hill to the water-jump, Blake raises his whip and sends his horse along, steering him grandly at an angle which will land him over the water-jump on to the course without losing a yard; he catches him by the head and brings him up the straight with a rush that would have done no discredit to Aldcroft.

Can he pass him in the last two hundred yards? He is going twice as fast as the leader, and 'The Pinnacle' is pumped out. They are at the carriages now, and he barely reaches Rathcoffey's quarters; Fitzgerald has not moved, but whilst the roar ascends of "Ride, Fitzgerald, ride," he raises his left arm, and, sitting back, he gives Rathcoffey two behind the saddle which just resound as he strikes him, and the horse coming grandly, he is just enabled to land him the

winner of the Regimental Cup by half a length, amidst intense excitement.

It was a good race, very much better than most. Nevertheless, as, standing by the steps of the drag, the Squire looks up at Barbara Hetherington, who is occupying one of the box seats, he exclaims,—

“Just gave the race away. So like an amateur! Wanted to win on the post, like Fordham in a nursery handicap with a lot of boys. Might have known that Peebles and his head man had been coaching Fitzgerald for the last month, and then he lets him slip away.”

And what said Barbara Hetherington? Well, from my coign of vantage just behind her, I saw her looking down as if she loved him; I say *as if*; and no doubt she poured oil on the troubled waters (later on he

poured down the wine), and I heard her ask him why he had not run "Montalto," his latest purchase.

"Oh," he exclaimed, "he arrived here coughing, got cold in the boat, was evidently made up for sale; he's hardly over his physic yet; have not even had a trial of him myself, but shall have him out before the Derby week. Shall you stay on with the General till then?" Miss Hetherington hopes so, and the Squire then suggesting lunch, we all scramble down by ladder or steps, and I find myself escorting dear little Mrs Burton to the luncheon tent, not the worst part of the day's doings. If it were not so crowded, it would be just perfect. Whatever fault might be found with the other arrangements, here at least it was impossible to be gravely hypercritical. What if you were a little

interrupted in your own *tête-à-tête* conversation, and your own selected lunch, by urgent though whispered requests to just cut another piece of tongue, or reach over and get another helping of pie, and if glasses of champagne are reached for and filled up within a few inches of your ear? You can do very well if you are anywhere near. I was lucky enough to secure a place for Mrs Burton more out of the thoroughfare than anywhere else, and was modestly hoping that she felt as well looked after as she would have been by any other of her more regular aides-de-camp in waiting, and I candidly admit I liked the job, and though she and Burton had to a great extent robbed me of my boy, I could forgive her, and if for no other reason our mutual sorrow for his loss forms a link between us to this day.

Presently the saddling bell for the next race begins to ring, and the riders, who have snatched a fugitive lunch, are off to perform the rites of toilet and weighing out. But it was not to give a detailed account of the meeting, but owing to other circumstances, that I introduced it into my memoir. At this date probably few remember, and fewer would care to have the catalogue of events particularly described ; suffice it therefore to relate that, with “ bands playing and colours flying,” the day was successfully concluded, and that Captain Blake vindicated his fame by winning a good race home on Captain Peebles’s Kildare, in the Ligioner Stakes. (This race was confined to the horses of field-officers and staff, and of past members of the corps, and naturally Captain Peebles had something dark and good for it—man

of enigmas ! a mystery to the cornets, but consulted by every one in matters of doubt and difficulty connected with the fair sex, the money-lender, or horseflesh. How well I remember you, popular with all ranks, and the terror of the messman.) Nor does it boot to relate how MacDonagh won the charger's race on the flat with Ballycastle, or how Captain Watson steered the Colonel's horse to victory in the match ; or to describe how, with several falls included, the hunter's race was lost and won.

And pleasant it was, after it was all over, to stroll quietly back with the Burtons, and have a cup of tea and a general discussion of the day, its fortunes and misfortunes, with them, and Allan and Fitz, before the ordeal of mess on a " big night."

CHAPTER III.

“O mount and go,
Mount and make you ready,
O mount and go,
And be the Captain's lady.

When the drums do beat,
And the cannons rattle,
Thou shalt sit in state,
And see thy love in battle.”

ON a Saturday towards the end of May, it is 7.15 A.M., at the Waterloo Station, and there is a little more hurry and confusion there this morning than is usually visible at that early hour. Inspectors and guards appear more numerous, and liveried grooms hie to and fro from their third-class carriages to the horse-boxes, where the mounts for the Duke and Staff, and various members from the then Horse

Guards and War Office are ensconced, while on the platform are representative officers from nearly all the corps—Horse, Foot, and Dragoons. Some have been merely dining out the night before, and after tubbing at six, and a comfortable chota-hazri, look particularly well shaved and clean ; others have been up half the night, possibly done Cremorne and supped at the “Pall Mall.” They look as if they had dressed in a hurry, and as if their coats were “stareing.”

“Which of the chargers do you ride to-day?” says Teddy Burton to his tall, fair, young-looking subaltern. (Teddy Burton has been at the Raleigh till 3 A.M., but looks fresh and fit, and is smoking a large cigar after the single cup of tea and strip of dry toast he has bolted between the staircase and his hansom.)

“Oh, Killinchy to-day ; he’s perhaps a thought the showiest of the two, and I am going to gallop for the Duke.”

“Well, you look a bit tired too ; been up half the night dancing in Grosvenor Square, I suppose. I don’t think you can afford to burn the candle at both ends like MacDonagh and myself. Where’s he, by the way ?”

“Oh, I hear his voice in the ticket office—not got, or lost, or forgotten his season ticket, of course. He’s acting aide-de-camp to the General to-day, and we will escort you to the field of battle first,” answered Fitzgerald.

“Let’s go on board the cars,” said Teddy. “Dress and breakfast as quick as possible when we arrive ; mutton chops for me, but I expect poached eggs and tea of the

strongest will be about your form, Fitzgerald."

A later train will bring down generals and aides-de-camp in full panoply of war paint, officers in scarlet, officers in blue, departmental and otherwise, bevvies of fair damsels, inclusive of the mothers and sisters, the cousins and aunts, not to speak of the larger class of partners in whom there is an interest, abiding and otherwise, and who have been asked down to see the review and lunch in rooms or barracks afterwards with the well-beloved soldiery. Some have come prepared to ride—these always in the best of fitting habits, while their horses have gone down before, and will meet them at the station ; others to be driven in the miscellaneous traps, tea-carts, dog-carts, croydons, or waggonettes belonging to the

officers, married and single ; but a large proportion will have to bargain with the extortionate owners of the open flys that haunt the station.

By 10.45, throughout the entire camp the troops are already in motion ; some have started for the valley, but more are yet in the restless throes of being paraded and “dressed” once and again by captains and commanding officers, an ordeal which inevitably precedes the outward march, while the calls that are appropriate to and never vary at certain hours in the barrack squares become mingled with the din of music that arises on all sides.

Here on the left a regiment of Highlanders, the plumes of their bonnets just stirred and fretted by the wind as they go by in a long swinging stride, and their

white spats gleaming as they put down their feet, like sudden flashes of light given and recalled from view, are advancing, and the wild music of their country rends the sky; in the opposite quarters to your own, an Irish regiment is being paraded, and their band gives forth the plaintive melody of "She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps." But it is presently drowned by the steady tramp of the Guardsmen, as the dark bearskins of Her Majesty's Own Bodyguard pass between you and them on their way to the Long Valley, and they march to the air of the "British Grenadiers."

Riding on the left of my squadron I am accompanied by the two gallopers, off troop duty for the day, and the riding-master, and we condemn the practice of parading

quite half-an-hour sooner than the necessity demands, and jokes are bandied as to how often we shall be called to attention, and stood at ease, and how many false alarms there will be, as the white plumes of some aide-de-camp are seen galloping in the distance, before the brilliant *cortège* of the Duke is descried advancing o'er the crest of the intervening hills. The Duke's inspection is more cursory to-day, and, indeed, he has many brigades and regiments to ride past, and take a general view of, before the signal for the advance is given.

What in those days was done so often and so well, and which in some regiments seemed to be the be all and the end all of their existence, was that day performed in a way no whit inferior to the manner in which it had been carried out on so many

previous occasions, before inspecting officers, the Duke, and the Queen herself. Moreover, it was Queen's weather, and that always enhances the brilliancy of the proceedings. The Royal Horse Artillery, alongside of which not any other country of Europe can make a show, precede the squadrons of heavy cavalry, Lancers, and Hussars, each vieing with each other which can go past the steadiest, and with smartest precision, while the commandant of each corps, as soon as his front rank has cleared the Royal carriage, has wheeled rapidly round, and, galloping to the side of, saluted the Duke, and now sits statuesque with his sword at the "carry," till with another salute he may rejoin his regiment, disappearing in the clouds of dust. Meantime, their brigaded bands unite in

according the air appropriate to each of them.

Guards, Highlanders, Light Infantry and Rifles succeed each other in columns of double companies, and among the spectators it is not a question of how efficient the division is, or how admirably turned out, but of how magnificently the corps in which they are interested "goes" past, and wherein it shows its marked superiority. A quicker pace is now ordained, but for the Horse Artillery and Cavalry only, and as the fiat goes forth there is a revision and re-arrangement of the spectators; the military police are very imperious and exacting, carriages hired and private being hustled here and there, and mounted civilians ordered to rein back to give a few more yards of better ground to the horsemen, and a more un-

interrupted view to the inspecting staff. And now, to the air of Bonnie Dundee, in columns of troops, the cavalry division gallops past in a whirlwind, and as they reform, the "shouting of the captains" is heard. Scarcely has the last squadron reached the wheeling point on the farther side when there is an immediate stampede for the town amongst the foot passengers, while the mounted division look forward to a sharp canter in the direction of the north or south camps, and the Queen's carriage moves off in solemn state with its four bays. She will lunch at the pavilion, and return to Windsor at 5.30, and the restive horses are being quickly re-harnessed to the brakes and barouches of the quality who have driven over from a distance.

Allan and Fitzgerald having been released

from their temporary duties, took up their position, the one on the near, the other on the off, side of Teddy Burton's smart mail phaeton, the ribbons of which were handled by Mrs Forster, while Mrs Burton was enabled to make more use of her opportunities for chatting with the passers-by. And, as she half leant over, the sun shone upon her clear, oval face, and her wistful blue eyes, with their fringe of golden lashes, and Allan thought her a shade paler, but looking, oh, so sweet and pretty in her tiny bonnet, with its strings the colour of the Garde de Dijon rose.

Said Allan, addressing Mrs Burton,—

“What a splendid day we've had ; so hot, and such a dust, though.”

“Well, you look all right,” she replied ;
“quite spick and span out of the dust and

hurly-burly, and taken, I suppose, about two messages to some other galloper or aide-de-camp."

"Well, the Black Horse went past ripping, did not they, to-day?" rejoined Allan. "How solid they looked, and how they turned their faces just like one man to the Duke as they passed the flag. You're coming to lunch, of course; all the married ladies are, and a whole lot from town. I've got no one, and can devote myself to you."

"Oh, do, you are always such a dear boy, and who are coming? Miss Hetherington, of course. She's always down here now—did Teddy ask her? I should think by this time he needn't care to go in the ruck with a lot of subalterns."

"Oh, no, don't you know—do you mean to say you have not heard?" exclaimed

Allan. "Oh, I forgot, you've been away for the last week ; she's going to be married to the Squire."

A smile of pleasure passed over Mrs Burton's features, like a faint ripple in the sunlight on some lake, but was as instantly over-clouded, as she murmured to herself,—

"Then we shall have her always with us."

"Oh, no, Mrs Burton, don't be alarmed about her cutting us all down, and disorganising the regiment, and playing the Queen of Beauty, etc., etc. She is not likely to make such a fool of herself as that, I know her pretty well by this time. Oh, no, poor Teddy will get his *congé* very soon, if he has not got it already, with a lot of others. Oh, no ; that girl has got a level head upon her shoulders, will make the Squire a most excellent wife and chate-

laine,—ask us all down to Godsall Hall, no doubt. Ah, I forgot, I shall not be here.”

“And are you really going?” said she.

“Yes, it is pretty well arranged, and I shall feel it awfully leaving the regiment, and you, and Teddy, and all the fellows. But we are starting, and I had better take a short cut and be ready to look after you all at luncheon.” And, as he cantered across to the barracks, Allan said to himself, “Poor little woman; what a dear, brave creature she is! How sad, and Teddy such a good fellow. How can he be such a fool! I must tell him before I go; it makes me quite savage sometimes to see him going on with other people. He does not know how good she is, and I—heaven knows she is the only woman I care about. Care, my boy! It’s more than care, I just—” (he would not

form the word he felt, even in his own mind) —“it is happiness enough just for me to be about her, to watch her, fend for her, as they call it, and I must leave her. I do so feel about her future; and Teddy—confound it, I will tell him straight; can I, though, talk about her to him? Well, perhaps it is better I am going away.”

CHAPTER IV.

“He could not frame a word unfit,
An act unworthy to be done.”

WHEN Allan got back to barracks, they were in apparent but unreal confusion, some men grooming and watering horses outside, some rushing across with officers' saddles and accoutrements over their heads, others tumbling down the steps that led up to the barrack-rooms, where they had been to change into their “fatigues,” pell mell. Jim would call to Jack for the loan of his sponge or curry-comb, while Dick, and Harry, and Tom have rushed off to the canteen for a foaming pot of ale, and are wiping their mouths as the stable trumpet sounds, which

will, to-day, be very shortly followed by the feeding calls for horse and man, and the dismissal of all the officers to their hospitable duties.

Carriage after carriage has already driven up, and deposited their burdens of black coats and summer frocks at the officers' quarters, and the ante-room has somewhat the appearance of a London tea-crush, with the usual dearth of men, when the officers, hurrying in from their rooms or stables, make their appearance.

“Nothing like a long review to give you a hunger and thirst, especially after a light breakfast,” remarks Fitzgerald ; but most of them will have to “bide a wee,” as the table is crowded, and there are only seats for a half-dozen of the senior officers, but what of that, after seeing the fair ones started at

some of the numerous dishes of cutlets, salmon, and lobster salad, etc., etc., nothing easier than to lay hold of a couple of bottles of champagne and convey them to one of the side-tables, together with a tongue ; the red round and the breakfast bannocks are already there, and the first, if not the last, pangs of hunger can be easily conquered, while intermittent visits to the table elicit sympathy for your isolation, and enable you to see that the glasses and plates of your friends are properly refilled.

After the luncheon it is the correct thing, in some people's eyes, to visit the troop stables, the riding-school, the cook-house, and various other quarters that contribute to the life of the soldiers in barracks. The band has not been playing during lunch time, but will now strike up near the back

of the mess-room walls and conservatory, so that walking about in the front you can hear the strains of the Royal Irish, and inside the barracks of the Black Horse, selected airs befitting the Queen's Birthday, while the musical devotees can, by walking half-a-dozen paces one way or the other, hear and compare the merits of both. Tea and coffee are early on these occasions, as visitors slip off to catch the 4.30 and 5 P.M. trains, so that the ante-room is nearly deserted by 4.30 P.M.

Teddy had not been behaving badly, but his wife had none of those tender attentions which she had now almost given up expecting; but nevertheless her heart was full within her, not of sorrow, but of weariness, and a longing for that intense love and sympathy it was so capable of returning,

and, unconsciously to herself, she was pervaded by a magnetic influence, which drew her to, and made her existence incomplete and barren without, the bright smiles, the strong tonic, as it were, of Allan's presence and direction in her everyday life. The finer chords within us do not respond and vibrate to the touch of any or every player; and, as in the days of old, the magic hand could only draw sweet music from the enchanted lyre, so in this case, not to the touch, the voice, the love song of anybody, would the finer senses of this innocent girl-wife have thrilled responsive, and they did not respond to the voice, the touch, of her husband.

Amongst men Teddy Burton was true as steel, kind-hearted and thoughtful, having all the soldiering qualities and prowess, by

flood and field, which gain admiration and respect. But he had been spoilt by women all his life, and, not being really susceptible to their influence, by the time that he was thirty, what with his agreeability, his handsome presence, and his experience in all the phases of love-making, he had come to trouble himself very little about the conquest once attained ; it was the first pleasurable excitement, the rivalry and the novelty, that attracted him. After that he did not regard them with any very deep attachment or constancy. Without looking upon them as chattel property, his ideas of them were more mediæval ; and he was not one who either had a deep insight into a woman's character, or would dream of cultivating or altering his own mind to bring it into unison with theirs. Regarding them more as the

playthings of society, he was unconsciously selfish and neglectful in his conduct towards them.

“You here still, Mrs Burton?” said Allan, finding her alone in the ante-room.

“Oh, yes, Teddy asked me just to wait till he saw the escort off; the sergeant and men, you see, are from his own troop.”

“Oh, the C troop,” said Allan; “of course he’ll send Sergeant Turner and the pick of his men and horses; and who’s in command?”

“Oh, Fitzgerald,” she answered.

“Yes, of course he is; good thing for him,” continued Allan; “he won’t have to get up at 5 A.M. to-morrow, counts instead of taking the belt. Glad it’s Fitzgerald; he looks so tall and smart. Let’s go and sit in

the other window ; we can see them start from there."

"Hulloa, Teddy," calls out MacDonagh from the open window, "we're quite in a private box here, like the Shah, and can review your army first-rate. I believe you've been borrowing my two best privates and horses. Which of the twins are you riding now, Fitzgerald?"

"Oh, Killowen," replied that fair young subaltern, as he raised his head and tossed the black and white plume backwards out of his eyes, and raised them, looking up to the "private box" where Mrs Burton sat, half screened by the leaves of the red geraniums.

"Well, mind you trot out, and don't look in at the carriage windows ; it's rude."

"You'd better be off, or you'll be late

at the Pavilion," called out MacDonagh. "The twins are very like, aren't they? With a shabrack on, I believe, that only he and his servant know the difference," he added, turning towards Mrs Burton. "Good sort, Fitz. You must make him your aide-de-camp when I am gone."

"Oh, no, the future Mrs Godsall is sure to appropriate him to fetch and carry for her," hazarded Mrs Burton.

"Don't you believe it," exclaimed Allan, "he has too much sense; you could not flatter that boy; he has the most unbelieving smile when they say anything pleasant to him; likes it, of course, but does not swallow it. I am sure he is true grit. Poor chap, he never was a Cornet; you know that I was the last."

"And you are really going?"

“Yes, I am afraid so.”

“I shall feel quite lonely, you’ve been so kind and nice ; let us shake hands, and wish each other good luck or something.” And, as she turned her wistful blue eyes towards the Cornet, he saw that they were filled with tears. A sudden sympathetic influence had nearly mastered him to say something, do something, to make her know and feel the blank there would be when she had gone out of his life ; but in the hot crisis of life, be it in the deadliest moral or physical danger, we act, as we choose to call it, instinctively, and the resolution which prevails and dominates the word or action is true and noble, or the reverse, according as we have inherited or formed a character of nobility, or the reverse.

So, albeit Allan MacDonagh was not a

saint, not religious from the ordinary point of view (some would have called him fast and wild, or worse), yet he had a standard, a code of honour of his own—to be disloyal to his friend, to have taken advantage of the weakness of the girl wife beside him, would have been to him beyond words dishonourable and treacherous, and with, in his case, the lightning flash to be noble and unselfish, he turned quickly aside, and, bending out of the window (while he crashed an avalanche of flower-pots down on to the pavement with a clatter, for the moment *anything* to relieve the tension), he said something almost gruff and of little meaning, as he clasped and dropped her hand.

And now he could call to Teddy to come up and set the little wife at ease by his half-

chaffy allusions to his departure, and see her and Teddy half way home, still able to look that gay dragoon in the face with friendly and honest eyes.

CHAPTER V.

"O formose puer nimium ne crede colori."

ON the Tuesday before the Derby day, Allan and I had come up to town after luncheon, and, having left our things at Limmers', and looked in at a couple of clubs, proceeded to the park, where we expected to meet Burton and Squire Godsall. We were all to dine together at the Naval and Military Club. Nor had we been long in the Row before we espied the Squire in earnest conversation with Hartington, the regimental dealer. Patrick Hartington was a short, little man, with shrewdness written in every line of his face, and talent speaking in his bright, grey eyes, placed rather close

together; with this he possessed a sharp straight nose, and a fine, wide, well-shaped mouth; but Sundays and week-days, and you might nearly add all day long, he wore right down on to his eyes a tall, silk hat of such sort and shape as is the one so admirably depicted and fitted on in the caricatures of the late Lord John Russell in *Punch*. He generally wore a pepper-and-salt suit, the coat being cut in the form of a pea-jacket, and to see him sitting on a chair in the Park of an evening, and with one arm negligently leaning over the rails, as he half turned round to talk to some equestrian, you might have taken him for a cabinet minister.

“See,” remarked the Cornet to me, “he’s hand-brushing that wisp of whisker that he wears under his chin right up to his mouth. He always does that when he’s considering

whether he has, or can get, a horse that will exactly suit you, and whether the price shall be one hundred or one hundred and thirty pounds delivered. I expect he is sounding the Squire."

"No, I think the Squire's dealing is done for the present, unless he is already horsing the brougham and barouche that are to be. However, we'll soon find out," I replied.

With this we drew up to the dealer and his companion, who dropped their conversation as we approached them, and Godsall, rising with a "good evening" to Hartington, added the words,—

"Well, you will be sure and come down on Thursday morning?"

"All right, Captain, I won't fail you," answered Patrick Hartington.

We three then proceeded up the Row, and

took stock of the horses, the riders, the walkers, the sitters, but stopped, as we were, every ten or twenty yards by the "good evening," and "how are you," of friends, and with questions from us as to how one liked Dublin and another Cahir, and endeavours to obtain reliable information as to the morrow's race from any one who was supposed to be "in the know," our progress was not very rapid, nor had the Squire framed his story or got an opening for it till on our way home to dress we had got as far as Apsley House ; then, with some little hesitation, he divulged the stable secret, which amounted to this. Certain disquieting tales had reached him through Jim Miller regarding the temper of Montalto, who, after his long rest and light exercise in the school, was now, as Jim Miller expressed it, "rightly

at himself," and had refused on one or two occasions to obey the rein or spur of his rider. Moreover, he had developed a tendency to rearing, and the batman, whose nerves had become deteriorated with bad whisky and much porter, had given it out that he would rather return to his "troop duty" than ride such a blooming box of fireworks on the road, or across the Queen's Parade with the chance of meeting a battery of artillery, or maybe them Highlanders.

Watson, therefore, was taken into their confidence, and as much of the stable secret imparted to him as they deemed necessary, and it was arranged for them both to go over with two or three horses to the practice jumps that morning, and see how he "offered." Mat O'Halloran was also directed to be on the spot, he having

averred that he saw the horse lepped over a lot of big places at Mr Lyndsay's, where, he said, Montalto was out exercising when he arrived. Then the Squire went on to relate how Watson, mounting him quietly near the jumps, patted and "soothered" him down, as he called it, and walked him about, just showing him the places. Here Allan interposed,—

"I would not have shown them to him at all, but have let him gallop up to them full swing; that's just like showing a child the deftly-mixed, red-looking powder in the spoon, or letting it smell the castor oil."

"Never you mind," responded the Squire; "Watson always begins with them that way, and he is about as good as most of them at schooling a horse."

"Well, what happened?" from me.

“ Oh, well, he trotted him up to a nice easy bank, with an apology for gorse on the top, and a narrow ditch in front; any horse could walk up to and over it.”

“ Well ? ” from us both.

“ Oh, he just stopped when he came up to it, then he turned him round and trotted him faster at it twice; both times he showed signs of rearing; then he took him a long way back and raced him at it, and Mat O'Halloran shouted, we all shouted at him, and he cleared it magnificently; but the beggar increased his pace, caught hold of the snaffle, and swerved clean out of the track, past the next jump. Watson got him in again, and straight for the water-jump; here he tried to swerve again, and just jumped it sideways at the corner, splashing up the water with his hind feet,

and again boring out of the track ; however, with a terrific left-hander from his cutting whip on the shoulder and neck, and a sudden strong pull with the right hand, he got him straight for the double, pulling hard and going like mad."

" Well ? "

" Oh, I don't know how it happened exactly ; but it seemed to me as if Watson gave him a free head, then pulled him suddenly together with all his strength ; got him well in hand, to steady him and make him look at his fence, and then, with a loosened rein as he rose, and a terrific dig with the spurs as he was preparing to do so, they landed on the top—a regular scramble, though, and he did not change his feet well at all."

" And did you get on him ? " I queried.

“ Oh, yes,” said Godsall ; “ after that, we took him away for more than half-an-hour, and walked him about until he was quite cool. We did this on purpose, and then I trotted him over to the one he had not seen before—the one with the largest ditch in front.”

“ Well ? ”

“ Oh, the same old game, till he finally got his forelegs in it. Then I turned him round and gave him the deuce of a thrashing till he nearly rolled over with me, and then he flew that first fence as he did with Watson ; then, what with the aid of a good blow from Mat O'Halloran's ash-plant, and a combination of shouts, he tore over the next fence, and tried to make a bolt of it.”

“ And what do you think of it all now ? ”
I said.

“ Oh, I can't exactly make out,” the Squire responded. “ Of course, the horse may have gone wrong, and developed temper with Lyndsay and got the best of them. One thing's quite certain, I have been jugginised somehow ; but how, I can't see yet. Hartington swears he knows the horse, and that he was quiet in temper and a free fencer. However, I have trysted him to come down to Aldershot on Thursday and look the quod over—”

“ And Lyndsay ? ” I suggested.

“ Oh, yes ; I have wired over for his address anyhow, but I think, if we look into the Raleigh to-night late, we shall find him there ; but I don't see how he can help us, or what we can say to him much ; it is always ‘ *caveat emptor*, ’ you know.”

Here the Cornet unwittingly remarked,—

"You don't think it's a horse robbery of sorts, do you?"

"By Jove, I never thought of that!" exclaims the Squire; "but it's much too dangerous and big a job for Mat to have undertaken; if it had been a common swindle, I would have suspected him at once. Of course, the lapse of time would make a difference in the horse's appearance, and I never had my hands over him, you know; but what a thundering good horse he looks, and ought to be."

"Did Mat come up to-day?" asked Allan.

"Oh, yes, I saw him in the train, and it struck me I would send him to Tattersall's to look at some second-hand coach harness that is going up there on Thursday, and do the buckling and unbuckling for me if I went up there this evening, and, by Jove,

I believe he must be there still. I'll tell you what, I'll just send a commissioner up there to tell him to come down to Limmers' before we go to dinner."

Mat arrived in the swagger suit that betokened racing, and the interview was short but pointed. The Squire merely informed him that Hartington was going down to the barracks to look over the horse on Thursday, and that he expected him to be there too. We dressed, and had a genial dinner at the Naval and Military Club, and later on found Lyndsay at the Raleigh, who scoffed at the idea of his horse refusing or showing temper, and volunteered to go down to the Camp on Thursday too.

CHAPTER VI.

“And he that stands upon a slippery place,
Makes nice of no vile hold to stay him up.”

WHAT were Mat O'Halloran's feelings as he viewed and reviewed the situation, this way and that, dividing the swift mind, as Homer puts it? It was clear that the robbery was out, or would be in eight-and-forty hours; what a fool, what an idiot he had been! He had been done, he had been hocused himself; that d—d whisky had done it. M'Goveney had robbed him, but there was no help for him in that direction, and in the other he didn't see his way out at all. There was no one whom he could “square,” and hush money did not come

into the case. If M'Goveney had not got his receipt he might have saddled him with the transaction, or at any rate by a good deal of perjury have left it an open question, he thought, but now he was fairly cornered ; this was a dilemma from which there was no escape, and the final result what ? Used to be transportation for fourteen years ; he remembered that as a boy, when his cousin Mick Sullivan was sent away at Her Majesty's expense ; he would get seven years in jail, or at the least three, he imagined ; he would be done all round. The barrack gates of the old corps would be closed against him for ever, and of every other regiment too ; if he did go over to Ireland and sneak into the lines of some other corps, he would be found out in three or four days. Confound them, they all knew him. No, there was

nothing for it, he must make a clean bolt of it—either America or Australia would do, but the money; that was the question. How much could he beg, borrow, or steal? And he went through in his own mind the number of bookmakers, dealers, and hangers-on about Tattersall's, whom he might get hold of upon the course and borrow from, appraising those who were good for a sov. or more, and those who would see him further first, and calculating how many sovs. he could get out of the officers to "put on real good things;" all told, it did not amount to very much. Enough, perhaps, to take him out to America or Australia, but, then, if he was "wanted," the "wire" would stop him there, overtaking him on the way out; but surely they would not prosecute him, "poor old Mat,"

who had ridden in the celebrated hunt at the Kaskama River, and fought in all the affairs with the Kaffirs. Then he debated in his own mind the advisability of confessing the whole of his villany, but even when desicated, or dressed up, it looked too ugly for pardon. There was nothing left for him but to bolt ; he must go to his brother in America ; he had heard he was doing well there, a partner in an hotel ; he would easily find him out through one of the "brotherhoods," to which he knew he still belonged. Thus, in agony of uncertainty, suspense, remorse, and genuine grief at the wrench from the old associations of thirty years, which he knew must come, Mat O'Halloran traversed Bond Street, Oxford Street, Regent Street, and Piccadilly, when he suddenly remembered that he had

a cheque for £3 in his waistcoat-pocket, and which he had received from Mr Stevenson. Whatever happened eventually, he still had twenty-four hours to the good as an innocent man, and see the Derby run he would; besides, who knows? He had something on, and he might win what would help to keep him. Then he felt in the flap-covered pocket of the dark green swagger waistcoat to see if it was safe, and drew out not one, but two, the second being the half-written cheque made out to Cornet MacDonagh. He almost started as he felt, and looked at it, and the idea forced itself upon him at once to make use of it somehow. He had now got as far as Hyde Park Corner in his wanderings, and again pulling out both cheques, he examined one of them as carefully as the gas-lamps permitted, for it was now between nine and

ten at night. Mat came to the conclusion he would think the matter well over in his own little room in Mitre Court, just behind the Naval and Military Club, and see if anything could be done.

There, in his little square, badly-furnished bedroom on the first floor, lighted more by the street lamps and private burners over the shops than by the composite on the table, Mat paced up and down, but at length resolutely drew himself up to the bare wooden table, and laid the cheques in front of him, at the same time pulling the stump of a quill pen from his other waist-coat pocket, and the little horn ink-bottle from his coat-pocket. At any rate he would see on the back of an envelope how nearly he could imitate the required signature and handwriting. He had only three

or four words to endorse, as the Colonel never added the word pounds after the written number, but ended the space with a long curved dash. The black leather pocket-book with its elastic wire and clasp would surely furnish him with plenty of orders or notices to tradesmen, and perhaps an old pass or two with the Colonel's signature which he had got for one of the men from the orderly sergeant, and for which they had never been asked again; moreover, when the regiment lay at Barchester, and Conlig was made out of bounds, he had not unfrequently written the Colonel's name to a "pass" there, and in such a way as to easily deceive the provo-sergeant on his marauding ride. But this would require the greatest care and accuracy, and he could not do better than copy that order

for a hundred currant loaves, with which he had been sent to the baker's last Christmas, when the Colonel gave the band, the married people and children, and whoever liked to come, tea and a dance. The signature was not hard to manage ; the L was peculiar, but easy to form ; the loop of the Y was not crossed, but its angle was easily observed ; the T was short and thick, with a straight cross at right angles to it, and the "on" offered no further difficulties. After several trials quickly and slowly, leaning lightly or heavily, he succeeded far better than he had ever hoped. That accomplished, a further obstacle stared him in the face ; but it was now eleven o'clock, and he felt the pangs of hunger and thirst, but the public-houses would still be open, and he could get some cold meat and

whisky, or bread and cheese and beer, and there resolve how this difficulty could be effectually overcome. If, as appeared inevitable, he wrote, as he called it, Allan MacDonagh's name upon the back, there would be no chance of his getting it cashed at Cox's (for Allan's was a difficult hand to copy, and he signed in various ways, and with a second Christian name), whereas, if he offered it at any other bank, he would have to be specially vouched for, and queries would be immediately made, perhaps even he would be watched by detectives as he left the bank with the suspected cheque in his pocket uncashed. Would Steel or Tom King cash it on the course? Well, hardly. Perhaps if it had only been for fifty they might have, and though knowing the Colonel's, they did not

know MacDonagh's signature, he surmised.

Mat O'Halloran found the "Black Bear" open, and, after cold beef and bread and Bass, followed by two glasses of whisky and cold water, he felt more fit to cope with the entanglements of the situation, and less compunction than hitherto as to the means he took; and, thinking it well over, he resolved on a ruse by which he might obtain Cornet MacDonagh's signature.

CHAPTER VII.

“ Who steals my purse, steals trash ; 'tis something,
nothing ;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands ;
But he that filches from me my good name,
Robs me of that which nought enriches him
And makes me poor indeed. ’

WHERE Burton, and Allan and I were to breakfast, had not been decided ; but on my entering the coffee-room, I perceived that Mat was in confabulation with MacDonagh. The greasy leather pocket-book, with its regimental devices, and the black horse in gold on its back, lay on the table of the little den then dignified by the name of a writing-room, and which abutted on the coffee-room at that date, and had been a

little smartened up by a carpet in lieu of the sanded floor.

“What’s up?” I inquired.

“Oh, only Mat O’Halloran sent Charles up to say I owed him four quid, and would I pay him, and he had the ‘transactions’ in his pocket; and that he also had some particular tip to give me, so I came down, but we’re nearly done,” and with this he inquired of Mat if they were quite quits, to which O’Halloran answered, “Yes, sir,” and added, “Would you mind, sir, sure it would be no trouble to you, and they don’t know me at Cox’s, if you would put your name on the back of a couple of small cheques I have here from the officers, just £3 and £5, from Mr Stevenson and Captain Watson, who won’t come up till the Oaks day,” and with this he held up two cheques close together

between his fingers ; the face of the one presented to view being that of Mr Stevenson's. This he laid face downwards for Allan to sign, holding the other by his side ; and this being accomplished he placed the other also face downwards in a similar manner, but this time, as though he meant to keep it steady for the writer, he kept two of his dirty fingers upon it, and his thumb just underneath the edge ; and the moment the Cornet's pen left the paper, drew it away, covering it completely with his hand while he blotted it, and then put it quickly in his trousers pocket ; the other he turned over and let lie negligently for a second or two in full view, before he carefully folded it up and departed.

“Did you allude to Montalto ?” said I.

“Oh, no,” answered Allan. “It would

not have been any use, and though I greatly mistrust him, I did not care to accuse him of a horse robbery when he may be innocent. The Squire will look sharp after him, I am sure ; but let's order breakfast here—or at the Club ? ”

“ Oh, the Club, certainly,” I rejoined. “ I like to see all you young fellows there, with your betting books, and race glasses, and correct cards, and hear you talk about the meeting ; besides, old friends are always turning up that morning.”

“ All right, old man,” said he ; “ and when you find a very old Shikari, bring him along to our table. I like to hear you trotted out upon India and pig-sticking, and all that sort of thing. You're coming down, aren't you ? ”

“ Well, I don't know,” I answered,

“there’s such a squash and a dust and a hurry, and I dislike intensely the babel of the ring ; have seen the Derby so often, like I have the boat race ; can imagine it very well without even consulting the “tape,” and after you have all gone off, can read the papers quietly here.” But Allan overpersuaded me to go, as it would, he said, be his last Derby for perhaps many a year to come. But while we were breakfasting, what had been Mat O’Halloran’s next move? Having seen us safely off the premises, he got an envelope in the bar, and, turning the cheque over, wrote on the back of the envelope “cash,” imitating the signature of Allan’s initials as well as he could. Then he placed the cheque inside it, and hung about the front door of the hotel till he espied a returning commissioner, whom he

confronted, and stating that the Captain was in a devil of a hurry, and just going to breakfast, ordered him to take the quasi note down to Cox's,* and return with it at once, and to say that the money was all to be sent in ten-pound notes and two fifties. The possibility of Allan MacDonagh being accused of, or ever suspected of, forgery never struck O'Halloran. He assumed as a matter of course that there would be some amount of investigation, and an awful rumpus; perhaps, even, he argued with himself, MacDonagh might have to pay up to keep the thing quiet and recoup the Colonel; to him that would only seem natural, but that Cornet MacDonagh would be accused of forgery seemed to him as

* With every apology to that eminent firm for the use I have made of their name.

likely as that the Colonel should be accused of forging the Cornet's name on the back. Nevertheless, he walked about "all eyes, ears, and fears," awaiting the re-appearance of the commissioner, and recounted many proverbs anent failure at the last moment. However, after what seemed an inordinate length of time, the commissioner returned bearing in his hands a large and blue-sealed packet, which Mat O'Halloran, seizing with avidity, carried off in the direction of the bar and the living rooms generally. He still had four-and-twenty hours before him, and he thought for many reasons it was advisable for him to visit the course and show himself at the coach. For though he was not exactly blown upon, he felt or fancied he was suspected, and that perhaps it would be better for him to go about

indifferently while there was yet time, than to stay away, which would only lead to his being further suspected than he was already of the horse robbery.

Mat O'Halloran did go to the Derby, but he did not hang round the coach much, or put himself designedly in evidence, as of yore, but waited rather humbly to be shouted at, and called to come up and have a sausage roll and some champagne; for on these occasions the "regimental man" was always given his luncheon. After the second glass, however, he "came" a bit, and, when further plied by the mess waiters, he was more effusive in healths and wishes for the old corps almost partaking of the valedictory order, and I thereupon observed to Burton that the clothes were the clothes of Esau, but the

voice and the whining were belonging to Jacob.

I subsequently ascertained that Mat, having for ever discarded his distinctive type of dress, passed over to France that night, and had previously changed into gold and smaller notes the ten ten-pound notes he held. This he managed by putting on half-sovereigns here and there with the book-makers in the ring. I further learnt that, on arrival in Paris, he made for the quarters of a certain English bookmaker, at that time warned off the turf, and whom he had befriended on some former occasion, and managed to conceal about the barracks when he was "wanted." I heard that with his aid the larger notes were exchanged and negotiated, and that, after lying perdu for a while, during which time he allowed his

beard and hair to grow, he got safely to New York *via* Havre.

Thursday was an "off day," and nothing had leaked out as yet respecting the forged cheque. But, as had been arranged, Hartington went down to Aldershot, inspected the big brown horse, and at once gave it as his positive opinion that the horse before him was not the one he had bought for Mr, now Captain, Godsall; so much so, that he advised the instant arrest of Mat O'Halloran on information sworn; at the same time he pointed out where the differences between the two horses lay, and after conversation with Lyndsay that night at the Raleigh, a warrant was issued for the apprehension of Mat O'Halloran, and a description given of him in the *Hue and Cry*.

The next was, of course, the Oaks day.

Now, Colonel Layton, who was always an early riser, had as usual partaken of his *chota-hazri* at 7 A.M., and had dressed and read the paper, and was strolling about Pall Mall by 9 A.M., waiting till the Club wore a more inviting and inhabited aspect inside, than the swept and garnished but deserted one it would have at that moment, so he bethought him of just going down to Cox's, and drawing out half-a-dozen fivers which might, at any rate, prove useful, if not very profitable. The bank was just commencing business as the gallant Colonel strode up the narrow passage that divided the rows of "loose boxes" on each side; the transactions of say a dozen regiments being conducted by a couple of clerks in each box, who sat at a sloping desk facing each other. Stopping opposite the last one on

the right-hand side, he pulled the door open by its little brass knob, and addressed himself to Mr Wyatt as he entered, saying,—

“Oh, Mr Wyatt, I was about early, and thought I would just come down and get a few fivers for current expenditure ; I fancy I must have about six hundred pounds to the good at present.”

“Well, sir,” responded Mr Wyatt, “I am afraid that your balance is not nearly so much as that ; you forget, sir, you drew out fifty on Wednesday week, and Mr Mac-Donagh cashed a cheque of yours for two hundred the Derby morning.”

Thenceforth they spoke in whispers, especially as an oldish man, with long grey whiskers, also entered the box.

“Cashed a cheque of mine !” exclaimed the Colonel, under his breath ; “nonsense,

there must be some mistake. You can't mean that. Oh, no. I'm quite certain I never wrote one."

"Do you mean, Colonel, you never gave Mr MacDonagh a cheque at all for any sum? We must be particular and exact, as bankers know a cheque is sometimes tampered with after it has been duly and honestly signed by the payee, who has passed it on at a shop or somewhere; if you recollect, a cheque at Drummond's was altered from seven to seventy, the original receiver who countersigned it being perfectly innocent."

"Well, no, in this case I am positive," rejoined the Colonel, "and I'm quite sure my subaltern has had nothing to do with it."

Meantime, Mr Wyatt, with the finger and thumb of his left hand, had been feel-

ing after the pages of the ledger devoted to the Black Horse, and turning more round towards the Colonel, while he rested his left elbow on the ledger, he said,—

“This is really a very serious business, Colonel, and I see,” turning his head towards the ledger, “by the little pencil hieroglyphics above the figures, that my associate cashed it; in fact, I remember his sending down for two fifties. Will you wait until he has done talking to the old gentleman with him, and write us a letter here, or from your Club, merely making your assertions?”

“Oh, I won’t wait any longer,” replied Colonel Layton. “I’ll write from the Club. I shall be there till Saturday evening,” and the Colonel strode out, forgetting about his fivers.

On his way back he considered the matter, and the more he thought of it, the less he could make it out; one thing was certain—the bank would be the losers. That was something, and as for MacDonagh, well, it could not possibly have been he, surely. That was an honest face, and the boy had a fine disposition, and young fellows were seldom popular when there was a bad drop in them. Nevertheless, he called to mind instances in his Indian recollections, cases in his London experiences, where nice young fellows, and hail-fellow-well-met popular men, against whom there had been no breath of suspicion, had suddenly been brought into public notoriety as having forged or swindled, cheated at cards, or even as having been guilty of the foulest crimes; but surely that boy, with his blue grey eyes,

that looked at you straight and fearlessly, and tossed his head so proudly, could never have committed forgery, and the Colonel went on in to breakfast.

CHAPTER VIII.

“I know a hawk from a hernshaw.”

HE and I went down to the Oaks together. By this time he had got over, or rather thought he had, the very idea that it was in the remotest degree possible that Allan had forged his name, and he talked of the bank having been had for £200 by some one forging his and Allan's name, making no secret of the affair.

On the course he expected to meet Allan, and at luncheon queried from the top of the coach,—

“Any one seen MacDonagh to-day?”

“Oh, no,” answered somebody. “He's just about Cæsar's camp or in Cocked Hat

Wood about this period with his troop dismounted. He's one of the noble army of martyrs to-day, Colonel. You see, they're having a sort of mixed battle down there, more sham and less fight than usual, and Davidson wired up for all who were not on divisional leave. Forster commands, and, what between the captain who's on the fire brigade for the week, and the orderly officer, and two or three who have not come away at all, I think he's got about a dozen."

"Oh, yes," said Billy Stevenson; he's going to make use of the riding-master and quarter-master as troop leaders, and have out the orderly officer and a couple of 'undismissed subs,' who can ride well enough, and won't get in the way."

"Glad I'm on 'divisional,'" ejaculated the chief, "so I got no information; they

ought to have sent for you, Peebles. I've seen you lead a squadron right well in the good old days in the 18th Hussars."

"You're very good to say so, Colonel," answered the paymaster; "I would not have minded burnishing up my armour to-day, but we should never have heard the end of it from the other corps. I believe there are only one cavalry and five infantry of the line to be out. I saw Allan last night; he was for duty anyway to-day."

And so the conversation dropped; but, during the afternoon, the matter of the cheque was frequently alluded to, and, as a bit of gossip, bandied about the hill. I need hardly say I never had the faintest suspicion that Allan was in any way implicated in it to his discredit.

On the Saturday morning, the Colonel

received a note from Messrs Cox & Co., stating that they had as far as possible instituted inquiries, and that, on comparing the numbers on the cheque, they ascertained that the one in question belonged to Cornet MacDonagh's book, that it had been brought to them by the well-known commissioner who attended Limmers' hotel, in an envelope, apparently initialed by Cornet MacDonagh, and with a verbal message stating how he wished the sum of notes made up ; and that, under these circumstances, and with the Colonel's declaration, they must unless they had a further communication from him clearing up the affair, take measures in their own behalf. This letter the Colonel did not answer. But what vexed and annoyed him beyond everything was a paragraph which appeared that day in one of the society

papers (let it be stated a penny one) in its tittle-tattle of the Derby. "Hillside jottings" it termed the paragraphs, and the one referring to Allan ran as follows :—

"Whilst strolling amongst the military coaches, an ugly rumour reached us that the name of the gallant and sporting Colonel of the Black Horse had been forged for a large sum of money, and that the cheque had been backed apparently by one of his own officers. We refrain from mentioning this officer's name, though it was frequently on men's lips during the afternoon, as no doubt he will be able to clear himself; nor do we attach much credence to the added report that he was in very serious monetary difficulties, and arranging an exchange to avoid his creditors. We would most sincerely regret it if the damaging accusation were

proved; at the same time, we could not stand by and see the honour (?) of an officer, and the good name of a cavalry regiment, saved by having the matter hushed up, and by screening the offender. Should this rumour, therefore, be unfortunately confirmed, we shall demand an even-handed justice."

Though a paragraph of this sort should be put aside unheeded, yet there are many small insects whose stings remain to rankle in our flesh, even though we feel that we should be above noticing their assaults.

But what was to the Colonel intolerable was the amount of advice as to what he himself should do, and the repeated questions as to what he knew of Allan's difficulties, and his private character and prospects; as thus, when, later on in the day, as he

was reading the afternoon paper, Colonel Dalzell, of the Hussar regiment into which Allan was about to exchange, sat down beside him, and commenced with,—

“I am vexed at this scandalous rumour regarding Mr MacDonagh, not that I can believe the story about the cheque, but you see that there are vague hints about his being in serious difficulties, and altogether, unless matters are cleared up, you will see that I must—I am afraid in any case I shall, have to object to the exchange. Can you tell me what his bad habits have been? Flying kites, or is he a defaulter on the turf?”

Upon this the Colonel “dried up,” and, rising to his full height, said,—

“Colonel Dalzell, if you have any charge to make or accusation to bring against Allan MacDonagh or any other of my officers, I

will thank you to do so on paper, and not in this Club," and with that he strode out of the smoking-room, called for the A B C, and went down to Maidenhead till the next evening, when his divisional leave expired.

Personally, I had not been a witness of this little scene, having returned to Aldershot that morning, but Burton told me all about it afterwards, and he and the others who were in town wired down to Allan their disgust at, and repudiation of, the "society" paragraph. The real solution of the forgery, and the mystery of the cheque had not then dawned upon me, for I had not yet learnt the attendant circumstances, or the fact that the cheque had been cashed and the proceeds handed to a commissioner from Limmers'. Indeed, we all assumed that the forgery had been committed by a so to speak profes-

sional forger, or some one connected with the bank itself. This also was the view which Allan had taken, and we had much talk together on the Saturday evening when we dined at a mess of five or six all told, and when he afterwards adjourned to my room. There, too, I had a long discussion with him, but chiefly about his financial state and his exchange, but we rather awaited the *denouement* of events regarding the cheque, than considered his implication in it.

CHAPTER IX.

“Bear through sorrow, wrong, and ruth,
In thy heart the dew of youth,
On thy lips the smile of truth.”

No one had seen the Colonel about on the following Monday morning, but there was a feeling of suspense and anticipation in the minds of all, as there is when dark clouds are imminent overhead in tropical countries. Rumour had not been idle anticipating that in some form or other interrogations would take place in the “orderly room,” and that the action of the bank, and Allan’s career depended greatly on how he comported himself, and what explanations he could give the Chief. Therefore, the orderly room call was on this morning awaited with

a somewhat unusual impatience. At 10.30, as he left his quarters, the dear old Chief shouted across the square to the trumpeter on duty "to sound," and what at other times during his little journey towards the other side of the barracks would have interested or amused him, failed that day to attract his attention. There, outside the B troop stables, were the B troop, with Captain Watson, just having returned from a morning's diversion at "heads and posts," and preparing to dismount, while further on he passes by Godsall (who has just obtained his troop) starting for a district court-martial some distance off, and with his batman in uniform behind him, on a second horse, as if he had been a field-officer going his rounds. As he approaches the orderly room door, the

sergeant-major of C troop calls forty of his men to attention, the last remaining of the regiment whom the Colonel has not inspected in their summer clothing; they stand in double rank at attention, with their bright scarlet jackets on, their forage caps well on one side, their white pipe-clay gloves on, and riding-whips in their left hands; and, as he walks along their front, the Colonel thinks that they are a fine handsome lot of young fellows; facing them on the other side are half-a-dozen prisoners up for trivial offences, with the sergeant-majors, a few troop orderly sergeants, and other "evidence." These also have been called to attention, and the troop officers who are there on regimental business salute their Colonel. The prisoners are soon "told off," and the inspection of the C troop men

postponed till the morrow. The orderly room has now been cleared, with the exception of Major Forster, myself, and the Adjutant. We three are standing, and the Colonel at once proceeds to the graver matters of the day by saying that he was sure they were all aware that his name had been forged to a cheque for two hundred pounds, but that there were attendant circumstances which it would require Cornet MacDonagh to explain before he was exonerated by the bank and the British public; he added that, for his own part, he had always liked, and considered MacDonagh everything that an officer and a gentleman should be, and felt sure he would be able to account for what had been attributed to him.

“Shaken” is too strong a word, but by the light of Cox’s letter there were the

facts of Allan's signature, coupled with his having sent, as alleged, a commissioner from Limmers', where he always stopped, to get it cashed (which letter the Colonel alone of us had seen and read); the fact that Allan had been in monetary difficulties did not affect him, nor the paragraph in the society paper influence him one jot, but the knowledge and recollection of the cases of cowardice, of fraud, and trust betrayed by those in whom the world had least expected it possible, made him brace himself against what he regarded as the terrible uncertainty of human nature. He deputed me to ask the Cornet to come over to the orderly room, and as I was going out of the room called me back, insisting that I was not to put it as an order, or give it any untoward significance.

As I was opening the door to leave, I heard him exclaim to Mr Davidson,—
“Who’s that man, Mr Davidson, walking up and down in front of my orderly room; why is he here? Why am I not told what he is here for; I will have him out of the barrack gates at once. Send for the orderly sergeant.”

“All right, sir,” answered Davidson, “but might I just ask him first—he might have some business?”

While I was away he was spoken to, and subsequently introduced into the orderly room by permission. In appearance he was of medium height, and fat, rather inclined to corpulence, excepting that his face was thin; he wore sandy “Dundreary whiskers,” no moustache, and his white teeth seemed to gleam, being rather long and visible.

His complexion was something brandified, the nose thin and red, the eyes of a yellow brown, sharp and ferrety. The thin yellow hair upon the top of his head was divided down the middle and brushed quite flat, except about the temples, where it was curled over into two huge waves that seemed ready to break back again over his head. He wore a tall shining hat, a turn-over collar, a black buttoned-up frock coat, with a smart geranium button-hole, light trousers, and patent leather boots. And this was, as he styled himself, the principal private detective of the bank. (He subsequently divulged to the Squire he did the difficult unravelling of cases, but was no trapper, as he could not disguise his personal appearance.)

After having been introduced by David-

son to the Colonel, he informed him that he had been sent down by Messrs Cox & Co. in a preliminary manner, as much to give the Colonel information as to elicit any he could for the bank, in fact, to watch the case generally; at the same time, he had been armed with certain authorities, and he tapped the pocket of his breast coat significantly as he used the phrase. He had nearly ended his conversation with the Colonel as I returned with Allan, and his last words before he left the room and stepped into the pay-office adjoining were, "Well, Colonel, this cheque is impounded now," lifting one of two from the table, "but I can leave it in your hands, and the hands of the officers here, I know, for its production in safety to me to-day." As soon as possible the Colonel, with an effort, spoke,—

“Mr MacDonagh, there is no use in our beating about the bush, or my reiterating to you how high, I should say how exceptionally high, you have always stood, not only in my opinion, but also in that of your brother-officers ; but we are here on a very serious matter, and I must just ask you a couple of questions. Did you send a commissioner from Limmers’ the Derby day down to Cox’s bank ?”

“No, Colonel, I did not,” answered MacDonagh quietly.

“Then,” said the Colonel, as he laid the two cheques face downwards on the little table close to where MacDonagh stood, “is this your signature ?”

MacDonagh answered,—“Yes, I believe it is, Colonel ; I could not swear it was not.”

“And that one?” asked the Colonel; “just bend your head down, look at it particularly.”

Allan bent down his head, and then, raising it quickly, the while he looked the Colonel fearlessly in the face, he said,—“I believe it is.” There was dead silence for some seconds, broken only by an ill-considered whisper of Major Forster’s to Davidson, viz., “Surely, when we believe him innocent, he could pay in the money, and Cox might let the matter slide as a blunder of some one’s.”

“Never!” almost shouted MacDonagh; “I compromise my honour, tacitly admit my guilt, and ask my brother officers to join in screening me? Never!”

He had hardly ended, when the Colonel jumped up, almost overturning the table,

and, seizing Allan by the hand, wrung it hard, exclaiming,—

“Allan, my boy, I never suspected you, but now I know you are innocent.”

The others all shook hands with him too, but I—he just looked round (for I was examining the cheques held in both my hands), and smiled gratefully at me; he knew I never had a shadow of a doubt of his innocence, and I clenched the matter, as far as the regiment was concerned, by crying out,—

“I have solved the mystery. Why, of course you signed them, Allan, at the back, at least, one from Stevenson, and the other from Watson, as Mat O’Halloran said, the scoundrel, in the little den at Limmers’; of course you signed them, but he did the

Colonel's signature, and he's got off with the money, curse him."

Mutual congratulations went round. Mac-Donagh turned to me, and said, "God bless you, old man! You would have seen me through fire and water."

Forster had at once run off to tell the mess that it was all right, and that Mat O'Halloran had done it.

But the clouds of darkness had not yet rolled over, for by-and-by said the Colonel,—

"I have this morning received a letter from Colonel Dalzell regarding your exchange, Allan, which I will read you.

" 'DEAR COLONEL LAYTON,—With regard to our conversation yesterday, I feel it my duty to myself and to the regiment I have the honour to command to say, that although

Mr MacDonagh may have already cleared himself in your and the eyes of his brother-officers, or though he may be able to do so before he is promoted to the lieutenancy, from which rank he exchanges, yet, under all the circumstances, I shall feel obliged to object to the exchange being carried out unless he is enabled to give proofs beyond his own word, and such as would convince a British jury. I cannot afford to have any officer in my regiment against whom there is the slightest suspicion of any sort.—Yours, etc.,

‘G. DALZELL, *Colonel.*’

“I should think not,” said the Chief. “Old fool! I told him you were much too good for them in the ‘Rag.’”

Allan then talked of leaving if he could

not get an exchange, but to this the Colonel demurred for many reasons, saying it would be madness for him to go just now, and that at any rate he must wait a month or two, and consult with his friends. Besides, they might get hold of O'Halloran, and other proofs in the meantime ; that he would take care the real truth was vouchsafed for in London and the clubs, and that, if anything was done or said reflecting on Allan, that he and the officers would treat it as a slight on the regiment, and he thought he knew how to deal with an offence of that kind.

“ But what about dressing and an early lunch ? ” said the Chief, rising and expanding himself, as if after some hard work. “ I must go up to Cox’s any way, and ‘ insense ’ them with the right story, perhaps make an affidavit, and go through forms of law, and

we may release that detective of their's from Peebles's room—"

"Oh, he's out already," said Davidson. "I saw Burton and Fitz taking him into the mess just now, and I'll be bound that, between them, since he is no longer looked on as obnoxious, or dangerous, they will just make him 'full,' as Fitzgerald terms it."

Before we left the orderly room, the Colonel called out to Allan,—

"I'll arrange for this week and Ascot week leave for you. No doubt you will want to see your father, and consult on many matters, but could you manage the regimental dinner? You must try and be there next Monday."

"All right, Colonel, I think I can, especially if I can go away to-night."

“Very well, I will wire to you soon after three; you can catch the five train here.”

On this we left the orderly room, and Allan and I went into the mess room, where we found the process of “filling the detective” going on merrily, Burton having ordered a magnum of Piper sec, just to show there was no ill feeling. On seeing Allan, Messrs Cox’s man felt somewhat recalled to a sense of his responsibility, and stammered out an apology to him for his presence, suggesting that, until further orders from his principals, he had better leave his man there; but Burton thought not, except at the risk of grievous bodily harm from the troopers, who would “horse-trough” him, strap him, or commit any indignity on him at a hint conveyed

by circuitous channels to them. But, believing in his heart the genuine story (indeed, if he was worth his salt, he had listened at the keyhole of the pay-office), and, after two glasses of brown sherry, the detective returned to Farnborough at the back of the Colonel's T-cart, redder in the face, and considerably limper-looking about the hair and button-hole, than he came down in the morning.

Allan got a telegram soon after four o'clock, viz., "All right," from the Colonel, "you can go on leave till Monday."

The Chief had indeed at once driven straight to Cox's, and had an interview with one of the heads of the firm. They were able, luckily, to get hold of the commissioner attached to Limmers' Hotel, and with him proceeded to Vigo Street, where,

after the affidavits the Colonel had anticipated making had been completed, a certain document was withdrawn from circulation, and another issued in its stead.

CHAPTER X.

“Are these things then necessities?

Then let us meet them like necessities.”

ALLAN had wired to me from Dublin to meet him at the Naval and Military at four o'clock on the Monday, the day of the Regimental dinner, so thither I hastened at the aforesaid hour, prepared to embark upon the inevitable discussion of ways and means, his exchange, and his future plans of action. It was resolved we should adjourn to the little upstairs card-room, then practically deserted, and in it I recapitulated to him all I had been able to find out, viz., that, from information received, O'Halloran was supposed to have

left, in the first instance, for Paris, but that, if he did not go to Spain or Switzerland, he would probably make his way from one of the north European ports to America. I was able to narrate to him how, at much personal sacrifice of time and trouble, the Chief had obtained permission from the Duke to forward an application from him for six months' leave, he having explained to His Royal Highness how disastrous in the future might be even the rumour of a rumour having existed prejudicial to his character, when he might be seeking some appointment, and that, with reference to the exchange, and the collaboration of evidence capable of being fully and exhaustively placed before the British public, it was desirable he should have the chance of making the assurance

of his innocence, which we and the bank believed in, "doubly sure." We then with pen and paper, went into the formidable array of figures, as nearly as Allan could tabulate them—the tradesmen's accounts, sent in already, as well as of those who were awaiting the crisis of his selling out, exchanging, or being restored to solvency through his friends. It was easy enough to add up the larger accounts, including dealers, Holland & Holland, Limmer's, Tantz, messman, tailors, etc., and afterwards to make a rough guess at what the smaller ones would amount to. We found, when totted up, that the lot would reach to about £1100; while the assets, including a balance at Cox's, probable value of chargers, hunters, and traps, would hardly reach £750. The question

then arose who of the tradesmen would be complacent and wait, who would make themselves obnoxious, and who might be put off with so much on account till a more convenient season. However, after going through the pros and cons, although pecuniary assistance, save in the most legitimate form, he was too proud to accept of, I was nevertheless, after some difficulty, enabled to persuade him to become my debtor for £500, he giving me a bill of sale on his Cornetcy, value £450, so as to pay them all off.

We agreed he was to go down to Aldershot the next day and make his final arrangements as far as he could, and that I was to manage the rest for him. I had to tell him that Captain Watson's papers had been recalled, and that there was no pro-

spect of a step going before Christmas, so that his exchange would have, in any case, to remain in abeyance.

“And now, tell me about the old man,” I said. “How did you get on over there?”

“Oh, well,” he replied, “it was just like you writing; that had a great effect upon him, but he did not expect me, and when I drove up was just starting off with the little white dog for his usual tramp; he first looked blacker, and led the way into the little parlour, sat down in the arm-chair by the fire, and commenced to poke it vigorously, saying, ‘Go on, sir, I am waiting.’ It was not easy to speak, and as I proceeded he grew very white. I fancy he is getting much aged, and God knows I felt more for him than I did for myself; nothing but the knowledge that I was fairly cleared

would have prevented him driving me forth, like some ancient patriarch, to beg or hide my head abroad. He said : ‘ Allan, by your consummate carelessness and folly, you have gone well nigh bringing down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave ; you must go and redeem yourself, and in all your actions, and your future career, hold the unblemished honour of your house before your eyes. I cannot do anything more for you now. You come back to me a bankrupt, for that is what you are, sir, and your carelessness has nearly branded you with dishonour. I have said enough,’ and the old man left the room. I knew the shock to his pride had been severe, and, like all old men who live in a narrow circle, he imagined that every one talked of, and had an interest in, everything that affected him.

“And did you get on any better with him afterwards?” I asked.

“Oh, yes,” said Allan. “He mended quarely after a bit, as they say in those parts, and the next two days I made the most of him, walked with him, played backgammon with him, re-arranged the medals with him ; and, the morning I left, we went up into the ruins together, where we both felt that I was like some mediæval knight whose escutcheon had been dimmed, renewing in sainted chapels his vows of knighthood ; and, as I left to catch the car, he pressed mine strongly in his powerful hand.”

“But come,” said I, “these accounts have made me thirsty ; let us have a B. and S. or some tea and a stroll before we dress for dinner, and we’d better drive down to the Albion together.”

CHAPTER XI.

“Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And days o’ lang syne?”

THAT evening, towards eight o’clock, the reception-room below stairs of the Albion Hotel began to fill gradually with the members, past and present, of the old corps. There you saw some aged General, who had either begun his career or terminated it in the Black Horse, who had, perhaps, “drawn swords” at Balaclava, or fought before the gates at Delhi. Talking to him, there would be some later and middle-aged ex-Colonel of the regiment, comparing, perhaps,

joint notes on service in various quarters of the globe. On all sides of them in constantly dissolving and increasing groups, old comrades who had exchanged or left, were being welcomed, and greetings past. Such phrases as, "Don't you know Treherne, Burton? Oh, I forgot, he left before you joined;" or "Let me introduce you to Marshall, MacDonagh, used to be a great pal of mine," met the ear.

The youngest soldiers are mostly the latest to arrive, and the most conspicuous by their smart white waistcoats and beautiful button-holes. The question goes round as to who is to take the chair; and it is promulgated that, at an informal mess meeting, it was decided to ask MacDonagh to dine that evening as a guest of the officers then serving. In this capacity, therefore, he was

seated opposite General Ainslie, who took the chair, and who had on his right hand another ex-Colonel and General; on his left, the present Chief. Burton and I were right and left of MacDonagh. We were something over thirty in number at table, and to those who have dined at the Albion or the Freemason's Tavern, or assisted at a city feast, when some guild is entertaining its friends, it is needless to put on paper the variety or luxuriousness of the *menu*. Suffice it that the *carte* is a long one, and that the viands are served, as they can be nowhere else better. But where that prolific subject, the men and things of former times, forms the basis of the discourse, and the structure is added to and enlarged by the topics current in society, and in all of which you are interested, the *menu*, even of a far in-

ferior establishment, would not seem a whit too long.

Being stationed at Aldershot, the band of the regiment is present in an alcove at the further end of the room, and at intervals reproduces the marches and airs which have been most popular with succeeding generations of officers, and in the playing of which it takes especial pride. But now, in accordance with ancient usage, the health of Her Majesty has been drunk, the health of the Generals present have been responded to, and the Colonel commanding has answered for himself, while he has been vociferously cheered.

Coffee and cigarettes, etc., had been handed round when, by permission, Colonel John Layton rose once more to his feet and spoke, saying,—

“Gentlemen, it is an unusual thing at the regimental dinner of the Black Horse, with the exception, perhaps, of the Colonel commanding, to drink the health of any officer actually serving—unless we include those toasts which are given more out of amusement than seriously, and with which the name of an individual officer is coupled to answer for the rank to which he belongs—but we have with us here to-night as our guest, at present serving in this regiment, an officer, Cornet MacDonagh. (Cheers.) One who has always performed his duty as a soldier to my satisfaction, and who has gained the esteem, I might say the affection, of all ranks. It is his health and prosperity I am about to ask you to drink. (Cries of ‘Hear, hear,’ ‘in bumpers!’) He was, as you know, overshadowed by a dark rumour

affecting his honour, and though the legal facts of the case have not yet been put before the British public, or appeared in print, for I did not demean myself by answering the paragraphs which appeared in the penny *Wasp*, yet I am glad, indeed, to see him here, and to ask you to drink his health, as an officer of the Black Horse; and in token of the fact that he stands as high in our estimation as he ever did." (Great cheering, followed by the chorus, "For he's a jolly good fellow," etc., etc., and cries of "MacDonagh, your health." "Here's luck to you," etc. "Don't leave us, old boy.")

MacDonagh then rose to return thanks, and began in rather a hurried and nervous manner at first, saying,—

"General Ainslie, Colonel Layton, and

gentlemen of the Black Horse,—It is nearly impossible for me to express myself to you here, as I would to-night, to say how overwhelmed I am by the generous faith you have continued in me, or to thank you for the way in which you have rallied round your comrade. Never can I forget this evening, and should fate make it impossible for me to soldier on in the old corps with you for long, yet, whatever happens, in whatever corps, in whatever country I may serve, no other corps, and no other set of brother officers shall ever supersede you, my brother officers, of the old Black Horse.” And he sat down amidst a storm of cheering.

The talk now became more general, seats were here and there exchanged, and chairs drawn back, or added to, where a little

semi-circle was made round any particular centre. And as I suggested to Allan that we should walk home together, I whispered to him,—

“Nunc vino pellite curas, cras ingens iterabimus æquor.”

“All right,” said he, and towards midnight, when there were visible signs of adjournment, and the party was breaking up in twos and threes, a few walking, but most of them sharing stray hansoms to the west end, we started.

The striking of the midnight clocks, and the chimes of St Peter’s faintly heard in the distance, found Allan and me pacing the deserted causeway of Cornhill. The solemn silence that reigned around, the long dim outlines of vast piles of buildings faintly lit outside, and dark as the sepulchre inside,

and the nearly total absence of life so lately struggling there, struck upon us as though we trod the silent highways of the dead. Above us were the cold, unpitying stars which, from generation unto generation, have looked down upon the sin, the sorrow, the revelry, and the battlefields of men, unpitying in their far-off brightness. Slowly we wended our westward way, talking of men and things indifferently, of his chances, of his prospects, and what regiments would most likely have exchanges going on his return. Men, even in the stress of great events, are chary of their expressions to each other, and turning out of the more crowded thoroughfare (for by this we were at the west end) into Sackville Street, we parted; and, as we grasped each other's hands impressively,

“Good-bye, old man ;” “God bless you, my boy !” was all that passed between us.

I never saw Allan MacDonagh again !

CHAPTER XII.

LETTRE-DE-CACHET.

I HAD written a letter to Allan on the Ascot Friday from the Cedars, where I was stopping for a week, and given him some details of my visit, described to him the party in the house, the young ladies, their brother, whom I considered a positive loss to the service, and the kind and hospitable widowed mother. I had also confessed that, having naturally lost my taste for lotteries and betting in kid gloves, and performing the other duties of *cavalierie servante* at a race meeting, I had contrived to spend a good deal of my time at or near the regi-

mental coach. I went on to say that I had decided to keep his first charger Ballycastle, who would effectively carry my long legs into action if needed, and to tell all the little tittle-tattle about the meeting, which I thought would interest him. I wound up by reporting that the Squire was to be married to Miss Hetherington in about ten days, and that Mrs Burton, looking perfectly charming in a plain costume of soft white material, set off by the golden-yellow of Marshall Neill roses, had lunched on the coach two days, and that she was much distressed at the difficulties and unhappiness which had come upon him. I added, "She asked me to tell you that she would not write for some time, but that you knew she sympathised with you intensely, in all that had or might befall you."

I had an answer from Allan from Hom-burg about ten days afterwards ; he wrote saying :—

“I quite understand now why Messrs Cox & Co. are so supine about hunting up O’Halloran, and the extradition treaty ; you see, there are so many collateral expenses they would have to bear, besides which they would not be allowed all the trial would actually cost them, so that they prefer rather to let the matter slide, except so far as the warrant to arrest him already runs, than have their carelessness, in not at once noticing that the writing on part of the cheque was some three weeks older than that on the rest of it, and also the fact of their having sent me, as they believed, so large a sum without a covering letter, shown up in the Law Courts. However, I caught

the Squire at Aldershot, before he had started for Ascot, and induced him to promise to get out a warrant for Mat's apprehension on the horse robbery charge, by means of his and Lyndsay's affidavits. These documents, or rather certified copies of them, reached me yesterday, so that, with some little trouble, and the use perhaps of the telegraph, I can put myself *en rapport* with the police authorities of any country. Of course, I do not want to get O'Halloran seven years' penal servitude out of revenge, but I see nothing for it but having the scoundrel arrested. Failing this, I must take an action against the *Wasp* for libel, on my return, go into the box and have my bank-book, cheque-book (so artistically kept), and all my family history and circumstances turned inside out for the benefit of the public."

Allan narrated to me how he had easily found out the dwelling of the ex-English-French bookmaker, and gathered, though the description was vague, and his own French indifferent, that both he and Mat had left a few days before Frankfort races, to which town he had followed them, but, unfortunately, too late for the races. He added that the bookmaker, Timothy Benson, was still at Frankfort on a regular drinking bout, but that he was now alone.

About a fortnight afterwards I again heard from Allan, this time from Frankfort. He said in his letter :—

“ I have been obliged to spend a fortnight here, but it was important to me to learn as much as I could of O’Halloran’s plans, and I was also anxious, if I could, to have got hold of one of the fifty pound notes we think he

must have exchanged with Benson. This worthy's acquaintance cost me several sovereigns to make and keep up, but I could not get a sight of the big notes, and I am sure that Benson suspected more than Mat told him. The net result of my campaign here is, that I wormed it out of Timothy, that disguised, and under an assumed name, Mat had left from Havre for America, and so, old man, I am off there on the trail by the very next boat from the same port.

“The excitement of the chase and constant travelling, and the mixing with foreigners, and living such a different sort of life, has kept me from thinking too much about myself, but I have a hungry heart within me. I think of you all at the field-days and in barracks; always tell me everything when you write (you know I shall have

nothing to interest me out there), about yourself and the Burtons, and when the regiment moves, and whether you yourself go to Coventry or Birmingham; anything is of interest now."

I heard from Allan from New York, and again from Chicago, where he had been despatched upon a false scent by one of the Irish brotherhood, to whom he had gone for information of their fellow-countryman, Mat's brother, a gentleman who was also sometimes "wanted." His letters were fairly cheery, and he said, "Now that I am here, and before I take up the threads again at New York, I shall waste a fortnight by going down to 'Frisco. I shall, I expect, come into contact down there with an hotel-keeper, formerly a partner of the brother, and may find out from him the exact

address I want, or at any rate the town where Mat is probably hiding."

The next one was the last letter that I ever received from Allan. He wrote from Boston that the quarry had gone north, and that he had tracked him to a half hotel, half gambling house, in that city; that he had been in communication with the detective force there, and that one of them would accompany him on the morrow night to the gambling rooms where Mat was nightly assisting his brother. "I feel getting near the end of my journeyings," he added; "I hope to be back for a crack at the Woodcock, and perhaps a mount with the Warwickshire from Coventry. I remember the ball so well there, when Teddy and I left you at Weedon, and he first met Mrs Burton there. How is she?

and are you and Fitz in constant attendance now?" Then there was "I hope she" crossed out, and he went on, "Shall we offer ourselves to the Stevensons for Christmas? It would be so like old times to be there again with you, dear old man; good-bye till we meet again."

The circumstances which follow, including Allan's death, were narrated to me partly by the English detective and American police officers, and partly by the doctor who attended the dying hours of my boy; for, indeed, shortly after I had left the service, I travelled in America and made a special point of visiting Boston.

CHAPTER XIII.

“DAMNOSI SUBSILUERE CANES.”

BUT to resume my story. After writing to me, Allan had another interview with the Boston detective, in which they came to the conclusion that, on the whole, it would be wisest to delay the matter for ten or twelve days, and in the meantime communicate by telegraph with the Bank and Godsall, and get them to send out a detective, with a warrant for O'Halloran's arrest, and an application for him to be sent to England under the extradition treaty; and that, while Allan was to keep

himself in the background, and do nothing that would bring his name into the newspapers, a surveillance was to be kept upon O'Halloran's movements. After the lapse of a fortnight, the English detective arrived, and measures were inaugurated for the capture of the forger and horse-robber.

The hotel, political rooms, gambling hell—for it was all three—where Mat was in hiding stood in the suburbs of the town. It had been originally a very large country house, with a good garden at the back, and had belonged to a Bishop of the Church of England; so much so, that the room now used for gambling purposes had originally been built for a private chapel, but for ecclesiastical reasons left unconsecrated. The poorer parts of the town had grown out and up to it on all sides,

so that the front door of the hotel now opened on a common street, while at right angles to the back wall of the garden ran the two sides of a good, wide thoroughfare. Access could be obtained or denied to the gambling-room, either through the hotel, or through a door in the back wall of the garden. The hotel was large and roomy, and, cut up as it was on the ground floor into moderate-sized drinking-rooms, above stairs there were spacious sitting and bed-rooms, corridors and staircases, some of them for only one flight, and leading apparently nowhere definitely, like in some antiquated houses on this side of the water also.

The Bishop had been a man of means, and added to and altered the, in his time, ancient structure. A narrow passage led

from the back of the hotel to the private chapel, now a gambling den, and which was situated in the garden, and more or less surrounded by plant houses, tool houses, wood houses, etc. The chief income of the hotel was derived from the "green cloth," and the principal frequenters were inveterate gamblers, drinking sea-traders, betting men, absconded clerks, and pigeons brought there by professional "bonnets." It was out of the latter that the profits rolled into the "long firm"; the men in the former categories gambled chiefly among themselves. It was a good room; there was seldom any burst-up or fighting there, and the free suppers, plain albeit, were not to be despised; the wine, too, if dear, was good.

It was very difficult for a stranger to gain admittance through the hotel, unvouched for by some one in the "swim"; through the garden gate impossible, for it opened by a latch from the inside, and was so weighted and balanced as, when pushed open, to swing back again and shut with a clash, but any one could "get in" if taken thither by a "bonnet." That the police and detectives could gain admittance to the premises with a warrant in their hands goes without saying, but the little bell which hung on the back of the lower half of the front door gave ample warning to the door porter, if he were not at his post; and in respect of suspicious-looking strangers, he had his orders what signal to give to his master in the inside bar, whence, of course, there was an easy exit

to some coign of vantage, where the would be guests could be inspected from, and their appearance diagnosed.

Oblong in shape, the gambling-room still bore traces of its former honourable existence. The semi-circular window at the farther, the east end of the room, was of stained glass, while, between it and the oaken dado that ran round the circular space cut off by the altar rails, the faint impressions of the texts that had been painted on the whitened stone could still be traced. Here, where the altar once had stood, and where the worthy Bishop's household had knelt and worshipped, now leaned, and scoffed, and spat, and uttered their unhallowed jokes, the maddened votaries of the deities presiding over drink and play, for it was here the bar now

stood, and the bar-keeper dispensed his fiery drinks. Here and there the traces of a fresco of saint or angel, but half scrubbed out, would be visible through the clouds of tobacco which rose as the incense did of yore. The font and reading-desk had been removed, and most of the fixed seats torn down; but still there remained the handsome woodwork and the oaken seats of what had formerly been "the stalls,"—fully occupied when high festival was held, or the Bishop was entertaining a party of the clergy—but the niches belonging to them had generally been filled up with mirrors, either for the furtherance of foul play, or that the proprietor could, lynx-eyed, observe the progress of the game, and watch the tokens of a gathering storm upon the faces of the players, who sat

at either of the two small, or one of the larger, tables, which, for various games of skill or chance, filled up the body of the ex-chapel.

In a line with the one by which you entered from the hotel, a corresponding door let you into what had been a little vestry, and thence you had easy access to the garden. The plan of campaign had been previously arranged, and it was simply this. The English detective was, on his arrival at Boston, met by Allan, and they both, under assumed names, as Esquires from Norfolk and Bedford, "registered" themselves at the largest hotel, and, while Allan restricted himself to the marble-floored hall and spacious smoking-room, the detective—Scott, as we may call him—wandered about the principal streets; and,

as a matter of course, they were quickly "spotted" by one or two different swindlers. But, to make a long story short, after being obliged to give and take various drinks for a couple of days, they were put in possession of the "open sesame," at least so far as the offer of being taken to Michael O'Halloran's rooms may be called so.

The idea was for them on some excuse to arrange that they should be taken to the rooms rather late, when Mat was more certain to be presiding over the drinks or the roulette-table, and Scott here warned MacDonagh that, in the event of resistance, his own life would be much the safest of the two, as they would be much more chary of firing at an officer of the law than at him, and at the same time informed him that

though he (MacDonagh) would be most useful in quickly identifying O'Halloran, yet he was sure that he himself would have little difficulty in doing so, and could take some less known member of the Force with him than one of the regular Boston detectives, who were doubtless, all of them, known and studied by the "bonnets" who frequented the Den. Scott then produced a map of the premises he had obtained, and which he insisted on Allan's committing to memory, in case of accidents ; "but," he added, "old Mick is much averse, they tell me, to the use of 'fire-arms,' knowing that their use is liable to spoil his trade, and even bring imprisonment upon him, and I think, if they do not allow Mat to be quietly arrested, it will only be a case of hustling, and a rough-and-tumble stampede. Besides all this, I

shall have," he said, "six men on the garden gate, which can easily be forced with a blow, and six more ready in front, disguised." He then gave Allan a belt to wear round his waist with a "barker" at the back, and a whistle formed of gutta-percha and hollow metal, about the size of a castanet, and which could easily be extracted from the breeches pocket and blown by the pressure of the hand, when it emitted the most discordant scream. This, or the firing of a pistol, was to be the signal to the confederates outside. Allan decided to go with Scott, and, soon after eleven, accompanied by the "bonnet," they made their way through the passage hall, and past the bar on the left, where Scott casually pushed open the door to find no one inside but a drowsy potman, and on

through the back of the house, and along the narrow passage till they reached the glare of the gas, and the noisy, smoke-filled haunt of the gamblers. Scott whispered to his companion, as they were on the threshold, "Pull your deer-stalker down, and keep smoothing your chin with your left hand." Allan walked up towards the right-hand table with the "bonnet," while his companion sauntered towards the left-hand one, and, taking off his soft felt hat, exclaimed,—

"Who'll spin me for drinks," and with the word he spun it up towards the ceiling, the hat being twirled about in regular circles as it ascended and descended. On its alighting on the table, he called out, "Seventeen, now who'll beat that?" and no one responding, "Hi, boss, send down your drinks here."

Allan, meanwhile was by way of looking on at the game of poker that was being played at by a mixed lot of gamblers, ship captains, traders from Nova Scotia, shady clerks, and betting men, together with a few more villainous types of humanity hailing west. He had his back to the centre gangway, and, as the drinks were brought along, he recognised in one of the mirrors Mat O'Halloran, in spite of the altered dress, the stubbly red beard, and his general slipshod and dissipated appearance, and with that he drew his cambric pocket-handkerchief with his right hand across his mouth, nodding backwards as he did so to Scott, thus giving him the "office." Without delay Scott made for Matthew O'Halloran, saying, "You had better come quiet; I arrest you in the Queen's name."

“Queen who?” shouted one of the gang; and, quicker than it takes to tell, a move was made to hustle Scott, and get between O’Halloran and him. Cards were thrown down and money grabbed, and benches overturned. O’Halloran had dropped the tray he was carrying with a crash, and, turning, made for the vestry door, when he found himself confronted by Allan Mac-Donagh, and, as it were, putting up his left hand to guard himself, he called out loudly, “You won’t arrest me, sir, not old Mat!” backing always towards the door, but Allan advancing, he whipped out his revolver, shouting, “I won’t be taken alive!” while, amid the cries of, “Lock the doors!” or, “Open the doors!” “Turn off the gas,” etc., as the fear or cunning of the criers dictated, the shrill sharp scream of the detective’s

whistle, and its answer is heard,—and, as the Cornet faced him boldly, Matthew dropped the pistol, saying,—“ I cannot shoot my officer ! ” but still he backed, and had got hold of the vestry door behind him in his right, as Allan grasped him with his left hand. The tramp and clatter of the police as they bounded along the outbuildings could be heard, and the gamblers shouted to Allan to let him go, and blows were showered on him from all sides, and one of them fetched him a terrific one with a steel-tipped staff, which nearly felled him and caused the blood to spout from an open gash. The detective could render him no assistance, being surrounded, pinioned, and swept off his legs by the larger crowd right in to the narrow passage leading to the hotel. The police had burst the

outer door, and were now about to break in the inner vestry door, when Mick O'Halloran, jumping on to and tearing down the gambling-table, while he upset candles, packs of cards, and counters in his passage, covered MacDonagh with his pistol, crying out, "Hell-hound, I'll make you drop your hold!" and fired once, and missed; but Mat had seen his aim, and, seized with compunction, gave a sudden wrench with all his might, as he endeavoured to give Allan safety from the second shot, in front of himself, and whether it was that his brother's hand was unsteady, or that Mat had leant forward into the line of fire, he staggered against the door death-wounded by his brother's bullet, while, when it was burst open, Allan fell upon him suffused with blood.

The little vestry was blocked by the five or six stalwart constables, holding in their left revolvers, and in their right hands sword-bayonets, and the five or six fugitives on that side did not care to come on. Tenderly and carefully they lifted Allan and O'Halloran; the latter could hardly speak but took his brother's hand and told him he forgave him freely, and, feeling blindly for MacDonagh, as they laid him down, he was able to gasp out, "I tried to save you! tell them, tell the old corps!" as he was choked with the rush of blood to the mouth, and died.

The other and larger division of about twenty in number, had, ere this, rushed madly down the passage of the hotel, but found themselves confronted by three kneeling, and three standing constables,

who, with fixed bayonets on their rifles, covered the leaders of the crowd. There was nothing for it but to stop ; however, eventually, they were nearly all “noted” and passed out.

CHAPTER XIV.

“And the stately ships go on,
To their haven under the hill,
But O for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still.”

DIZZY, and weak from the loss of blood, Allan was conveyed to a small and private hotel, where he was seen to by a surgeon, his wounds dressed, and restoratives applied. He was not considered to be in a critical condition; and it was hoped, if fever did not set in, that he would be about again in a week or ten days. Dr Galbraith, an old Scotchman, attended him with unremitting kindness, and from him I acquired the last particulars of his end.

He had been a little feverish, and suffer-

ing from debility all along, but had gone to sleep early in the morning of the sixth day, while it was yet dark, and slept on till about four o'clock, when, it is supposed, he awoke, feeling much fresher and stronger. He had all along, even when wandering a little, talked of getting away home and seeing the old man, and being with the regiment again; and, from what could be gathered from him before the delirium swept over him, he fancied it was about seven o'clock in the morning when he awoke, and that he was quite fit enough for a little walk in the fresh cool air. His object was to find out about the steamers sailing thence, or from New York to England; and he fancied that, once on board, he would rapidly recover. It was now the latter end of October, and the

winter was beginning to set in ; the evening was dark, and snow was falling. Allan thought that he knew the way, and I can imagine him starting out briskly, and feeling for the moment revived after the closeness of his sick-room.

But, as he wandered on, his limbs grew tired, and his pace became slower ; surely, he thought, it was growing darker, or was it the falling snow that obscured, as he imagined, the rising sun. He could not have missed his way, he argued, and the waters that plashed against the quays could not be very far off. He must make another effort, and that long narrow street would lead him to it, and perhaps he could drive back again from the office. How his neck and shoulders ached ! and how blind he seemed to be getting ! the

houses appeared to be shut up and dimly lighted in this district. What had become of all the workpeople who should have been returning to their breakfasts or going to their work? How cold it was! the snow now was covering his face and clothes; he would make for that bright light in the cottage yonder (for Allan had wandered into the quarters of the harbour dock men); but his eyes grew dim, and as the door was opened to his feeble knock, he stumbled, fainting, over the threshold. Chafed and warmed, and brandy poured down his throat, he rallied for a time; but when brought home, the fever that had been checked set in again, and before night he was delirious. The kind old doctor, when he was brought back, had smoothed his hair and moistened his

lips with cooling drinks, and taken his hands in his, while Allan was able to give him coherent messages of love and affection to his father and his brother, and to the latter, that he knew he was more worthy to be head of the house than he was, and to rebuild "the ruins;" and a ring and a loving message to me, and to the Colonel, and the Burtons. For he felt himself, and the doctor told him, that he would be very ill indeed after the exposure, and with the fever on him. And after this he was little conscious, and fever and delirium held their sway. Sometimes he imagined he was on parade, or riding in mimic charge at Aldershot; again, he would be talking to me, as he did in the old days; anon, he would be with Burton, and mutter over and over again to him-

self, "Teddy, Teddy, I'm straight;" and at the last he raised himself, and, staring into vacancy, while he tossed his head in the old proud way, he almost shouted, "Father, father, I am still your son!"

We heard of his death by post, and Dr Galbraith decided, on the whole, it would be best to send over the remains by the following steamer, *via* Merville. He was buried in the little burying-ground attached to the ruined chapel, close to the home of his forefathers. At the head of the grave was placed a cross of Irish form, and on it were inscribed the following words, beneath the helmet of a heavy Dragoon:—

"Erected by his brother officers in loving memory of their comrade in arms, Allan George Berresford MacDonagh, Cornet of Her Majesty's Black Horse."

And there what was mortal of my boy was laid beneath the shadows of the yews. Changeless they stand, and as yet without decay, hard by, unheeding. A thousand years no summer sun has parched the freshness of their verdure, no winter storm destroyed the vigour of their manhood; they stand unheeding, and still their mournful branches sway above the households of forgotten dead.

And does his restless spirit wander through the vast abysses of space, and past the islands of unfathomed sky, cognisant in some degree of the scenes enacted here below, and of the companions he has left behind him? or have the pitiless waters of the Lethean stream flowed coldly over his spiritual existence, and does he lie in the darkness of his narrow prison-house uncon-

scious, blind, and within view of the scenes he loved to look upon, deaf, and within hearing of the wild clash of waters he loved to listen to, unconscious? We cannot tell.

THE END.

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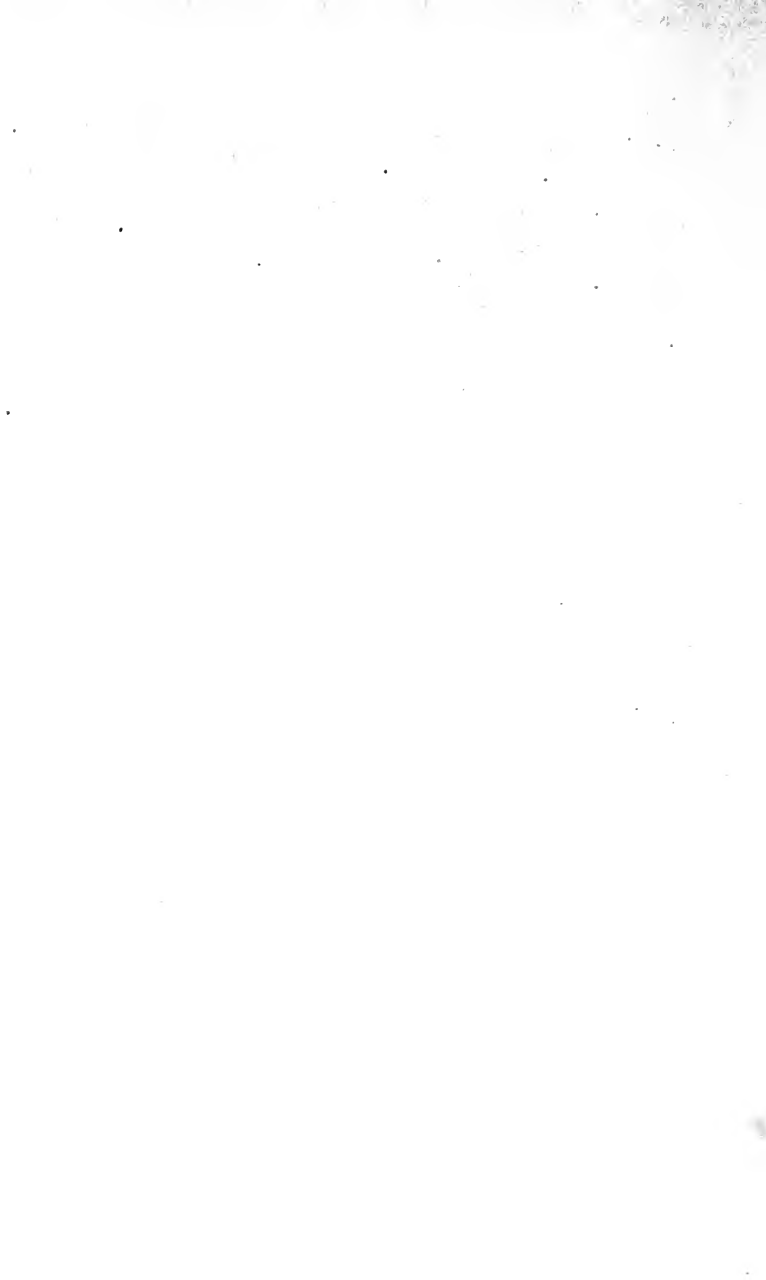
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